

LOW/MAX CARD GAME METHOD AND APPARATUS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention:

5 The present invention relates generally to card games and, in particular, to casino and the like card games wherein players bet on hands of cards dealt to them by a dealer. The present invention provides a novel card game method and apparatus.

2. Description of the Related Art:

10 A standard deck of playing cards typically has 52 cards, including four of each of the following cards: aces; twos through tens; jacks; queens; and kings. Standard decks typically also include two jokers which are not usually used in certain games.

15 A great variety of games are known in the art wherein a dealer hands out a set of cards to each player. Two well known card games are Black Jack and Poker. As with most card games, there are a large number of versions of both Black Jack and Poker known
20 in the art.

Additional exemplary card games are illustrated in U.S. Patent Nos.: 4,659,087 (Shen et al.); 5,098,107 (Boylan et al.); 5,282,633 (Boylan et al.); 5,294,128 (Marquez); 5,322,295 (Cabot et al.); 5,476,265 (Miller et al.); 5,613,682 (Otuzbiryany); 5,628,514 (Nguyen et al.); 5,632,486 (Mkrtchyan); 5,692,755 (Gutierrez); 5,735,524 (Wisted); and 5,741,012 (So et al.). These patents show a variety of games, including, among other things, card games using tables with peripheral player areas and a centrally located dealer area.

As one example, U.S. Patent No. 4,659,087 shows a casino game wherein the players and the dealer each receive four cards that are scored by splitting them into two "HIGH" groups. As another example, U.S. Patent No. 5,294,128 shows a multiple hand variation of the card game HI-LO poker wherein players are dealt six cards that are divided into a one-card "HIGH" hand, a two-card "HIGH" hand, and a three-card "LOW" hand. As another example, U.S. Patent No. 5,628,514 shows a method of playing a card game using a deck of 360 cards from 15 modified decks, wherein the card game is played according to either a "HIGH" winning scheme or a "LOW" winning scheme. As yet another example, U.S. Patent No. 5,322,295 shows a multiple hand card game wherein

the players are dealt supplemental cards with the desired goal of attaining a value higher than that of the dealer without exceeding a value of, for example, 21.

5 Although there are a great many games known in the art, there remains a continued need for games that are enjoyable for players of all skill levels and that are economically and functionally desirable for casino use.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention provides a unique card game method and apparatus that can be both enjoyable for all players and desirable for a casino or house and that can overcome problems in the existing art.

15 According to a first aspect of the invention, a method of playing a card game is provided which includes the steps of: providing a standard deck of cards; providing a game table having a dealer area and a plurality of player areas; having a dealer deal sets of cards to each of a plurality of players and to the
20 dealer itself, an equal number of cards being dealt to each player, said equal number being from 3 to 7 (most preferably between 3 and 5); having each player make a wager prior to viewing the face value of their respective cards; having each player split at least

three of their respective cards into two half-hands, a first half hand having a LOW value and a second half-hand having a HIGH value; having the dealer split at least three of his cards into two half-hands, a first half hand having a LOW value and a second half-hand having a HIGH value; designating a player as a winner if both a) that player's LOW hand is lower than the dealer's LOW hand and b) that player's HIGH hand is higher than the dealer's HIGH hand.

10 In a preferred embodiment, the step of having a dealer deal includes dealing 4 cards to each player and wherein the steps of splitting the player's and dealer's cards into half-hands includes making each half-hand with 2 cards.

15 In a preferred embodiment, the step of designating a player as a winner if both a) that player's LOW hand is lower than the dealer's LOW hand and b) that player's HIGH hand is higher than the dealer's HIGH hand is based on valuing aces as either 1 or 11, 20 valuing 2's through 10's as 2 through 10, respectively, and valuing jacks, queens and kings as 10.

In a preferred embodiment, a player loses when either: a) both the player's HIGH and LOW half-hands lose; b) one of the player's half-hands loses and the

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other of the player's half-hands pushes; or c) both of the player's HIGH and LOW half-hands push.

In a preferred embodiment, a player pushes when either: a) one of the player's half-hands wins and the other of the player's half-hands loses; or b) one of the player's half-hands wins and the other of the player's half-hands pushes.

In a preferred embodiment, the dealer area has a location for a chip rack, a location for receiving a HIGH half-hand and a location for receiving a LOW half-hand and the player areas each have a chip wager region, a location for receiving a HIGH half-hand and a location for receiving a LOW half-hand.

According to another aspect of the invention, a card game apparatus is provided which includes: a) a standard deck of cards; b) a game table having a curved side with a plurality of player areas and an opposite side with a central dealer area; c) the central dealer area including: a chip rack; a HIGH half-hand region designated by indicia printed on a top surface of the game table; a LOW half-hand region designated by indicia printed on the top surface of the game table; d) each of the player areas including: a chip region designated by printing on the surface of the game

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table; a HIGH half-hand region designated by indicia printed on the surface of the game table; and a LOW half-hand region designated by indicia printed on the surface of the game table.

5 The above and other advantages, features and aspects of the present invention will be more readily perceived from the following description of the preferred embodiments thereof taken together with the accompanying drawings and claims.

10 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

 The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description given hereinbelow and the accompanying drawings which are given by way of illustration only, and are not
15 limitative of the present invention, and wherein:

 FIG. 1 is a top view of a top surface of a game table according to a first embodiment of the invention;

 FIG. 2 is a top view of a dealer area of the game table shown in FIG. 1 also having a discard rack and a
20 card shoe thereon;

 FIG. 3 is a top view of a player area of the game table shown in FIG. 1;

 FIG. 4 is a top view of a top surface of a game table according to a second embodiment of the

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FIG. 5 is a top view of a dealer area of the game table shown in FIG. 4 also having a discard rack and a card shoe thereon;

5 FIG. 6 is a top view of a player area of the game
table shown in FIG. 4.

at DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The games according to the preferred embodiments of the present invention are referred to herein by the preferred trade name LOW-MAX™.

The preferred embodiments of the LOW-MAX game are preferably conducted with a standard (52 card) deck by a single dealer. Preferably, the deck is a regulation deck. As shown in FIG. 1, the LOW-MAX game preferably includes a game table 10 that can be sized, for example, similar to a common Black Jack table. The game table 10 preferably includes a plurality of player areas for a plurality of players. Most preferably, the table 10 includes seven player areas A-G, as shown, and a central dealer area H.

FIG. 2 shows a close-up view of the dealer area H in FIG. 1. As shown, the dealer area H preferably includes: a chip rack 30; a HIGH half-hand region 31; a LOW half-hand region 32; a discard rack 33; and a card

shoe 34. As shown, the dealer area can also include other indicia thereon such as the LOW-MAX tradename and indicia 35 indicating a commission to be received by the house (5% in the illustrated embodiment).

5 On the other hand, FIG. 3 shows a close-up view of one of the player areas A-G in FIG. 1. As shown, each player area preferably includes: a chip region 20; a HIGH half-hand region 21; and a LOW half-hand region 22.

10 FIGS. 2 and 3 illustrate preferred designs of the dealer and player areas, respectively. It is contemplated, however, that these areas can be modified as desired as long as at least one version of the LOW-MAX game can still be played (as discussed below). As
15 shown in FIG. 1, the table is also preferably semi-circular (i.e., curved on one side), with the dealer area H proximate a center and the player areas around a semi-circular periphery as shown. It is also contemplated, however, that the size and shape of the
20 table can be also modified as desired as long as at least one version of the LOW-MAX game can still be played (as discussed below).

 In a first basic embodiment of the invention, the players and the dealer are each dealt four cards from a

standard deck of cards. As noted, a single standard deck is preferably used. The players then arrange the four cards into two half-hands (i.e., into two two-card hands). The players make one half-hand as low as possible (a LOW hand) and the other half-hand as high as possible (a HIGH hand). The values of each half-hand are calculated by adding the face values of the cards.

According to a first preferred embodiment, the cards are valued as follows: aces at either 1 or 11; twos through tens at numbers equal to the numbers on their respective faces of 2 through 10; jacks, queens and kings each at a value of 10. The lowest possible hand is thus a 2 (with two aces) and the highest possible hand is thus a 22 (also with two aces). In one alternative embodiment, the cards can be valued as follows: aces at 1; twos through tens at numbers equal to the numbers on their respective faces of 2 through 10; jacks at 11; queens at 12; and kings at 13. In another preferred embodiment, the cards are valued the same as in a game of poker -- so that the lowest possible hand would be a two and a three and the highest possible hand would be two aces. It is noted that in this poker-value embodiment, straights and

flushes would not be possible.

Prior to dealing the cards, each player makes an initial monetary wager or bet. Although the game could be played without a monetary wager, or even without any betting, monetary wagering is much more preferred.

Preferably, each player bets by placing chips on the player's chip region 20 within his or her respective player area. Then, the dealer deals four cards face down to each player and to himself. The dealer preferably deals: (a) a single face-down card to the player at the position G; (b) a single face-down card to each subsequent player in turn in a direction clockwise around the table; (c) a single face-down card to the dealer himself. The dealer preferably repeats steps (a)-(c) until the players and the dealer each have four cards. The players and the dealer then split their cards into a "LOW" two-card half-hand and a "HIGH" two-card half-hand.

As discussed in more detail below, if a player's LOW half-hand is lower than the dealer's LOW half-hand and if the player's HIGH half-hand is higher than the dealer's HIGH half-hand, then that player "wins." That is, the player must win both the HIGH and the LOW half-hands to win the hand. When a player wins the hand,

the player preferably receives winnings in a 1:1 ratio, receiving an added amount equal to his wager minus a house commission. Preferably, the house commission is 5% of the player's wager. If the player loses the hand, the player loses his wager.

The present LOW-MAX game can be exciting for players of all skill levels -- from the novice player to the advanced player. It can also be a game that is economically desirable for the casino or house and that is simple for the casino or house to implement (e.g., requiring only a single dealer without a high degree of dealer expertise). The LOW-MAX game is thus beneficial for both the players and the casino or house.

A variety of modified versions or options of the LOW-MAX card game are contemplated. That is, as with many card games, a number of different versions or options can be played. Preferred alternative versions or options are discussed below.

Versions With Replacement Cards

FIGS. 4-6 show a first modified version of the LOW-MAX game, wherein after the players and the dealer are dealt four cards, a single replacement card can be purchased by any player upon the payment of a predetermined replacement fee. The replacement fee is

preferably an additional 50% of the initial wager. To receive the replacement card, the player must both (a) discard a card (e.g., face down) and (b) pay the replacement fee. Only then should the dealer deal that player a new face-down replacement card. Although the table 10' for this first modified version can be the same as that for the first basic embodiment discussed above, as shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 the table 10' preferably includes indicia 35' identifying that a replacement card can be obtained upon the payment of a replacement fee.

In another modified version of the game, after the players and the dealer are dealt their four cards, the dealer can draw a single replacement card. Preferably, the dealer can only draw a replacement card when either: (a) 3 of the 4 cards received by the dealer are equal in value; or (b) 3 of the 4 cards received by the dealer have a value between 5 and 10 (i.e., 6's, 7's, 8's and 9's). The latter modified version is preferably used in conjunction with the modified version enabling players to draw an additional card with the payment of a 50% replacement fee.

Five-Card Versions

In other modified versions of the game, each

player and the dealer can be dealt five cards. In a first variation, the players and the dealer can each throw back one card. Then, the remaining four cards can be used as described above. In a second variation, 5 the players and the dealer can use each card -- with one of the HIGH or LOW hands being based on the total value of 3 cards and the other of the hands being based on the total value of the remaining 2 cards.

Three-Card Versions

10 In other modified versions of the game, each player and the dealer can be dealt three cards. In this regard, one of the HIGH or LOW hands can be based on the total value of 2 cards and the other of the hands can be based on the total value of the remaining 15 1 card. In one variation, the players and the dealer can each receive one "free" hit after being dealt 3 cards (so that the player's hand thus becomes based on two two-card half-hands). In another variation, the players and the dealer can be dealt 3 cards, and the 20 players can be allowed to purchase a single replacement card for an additional 50% of their initial bet.

Four-Card/Five-Card Versions

In another modified version of the game, each of the players are dealt four cards and the dealer is

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Player Banking Versions

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In another modified version of the game, any

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Winning/Losing

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Preferably, a player "loses" when either: (a) both the player's HIGH and LOW hands lose; (b) one half-hand

loses and the other half-hands pushes (i.e., is equal in value to the dealer's hand); or (c) both of the HIGH and LOW half-hands push.

Preferably, a player's hand "pushes" when either:

- 5 (a) one half-hand wins and the other half-hand loses; or (b) one half-hand wins and the other half-hand pushes. When a player's hand pushes, the player's wager can, for example, remain on the table so as to "push" over and be applied to the subsequent hand.

10 Four-Of-A-Kind Options

In one variation of the game, a player can receive a set reward for receiving four-of-a-kind. For example, a set monetary value can be awarded to a player that receives four-of-a-kind.

- 15 In another variation of the game, a player can receive a progressive jackpot for receiving four-of-a-kind. In this regard, the player with a four-of-a-kind can win, for example, a set amount for each hand that is being played. That is, a certain monetary value can
20 be awarded to the player that receives the four-of-a-kind for each player at the table at that time.

The method for providing a progression jackpot can be like that known in the art for other card games.

Advantages And Modifications

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As discussed above, the present invention provides a game method and apparatus that can be enjoyable for players of all skill levels and that can be economically and functionally desirable for casino use.

5 The preferred embodiments of the invention provide a game that is simple enough for a novice player and yet exciting enough for skilled players. According to the more preferred embodiments of the invention, wagers or bets are preferably only made prior to dealing the
10 cards -- except that a replacement card can be purchased in one preferred modified version of the game. This, among other things, simplifies the game for novice players.

 While the present invention has been described
15 with reference to the preferred embodiments of the invention, it is contemplated that the same can be varied as would be apparent to those skilled in the art based on this disclosure without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Any and all such
20 modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the following claims. As some exemplary modifications, various modified versions of the present LOW-MAX game described herein can be combined together where appropriate. For example, the variations,

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versions and options can be combined together as appropriate, such as varying valuation, numbers of cards dealt and/or in the hi and low half-hands, replacement cards, draws, banking, progression, etc., as desired. It is also contemplated that additional embodiments of the game can include community cards (e.g., one or two commonly used cards for each player as is known in the art). It is also contemplated that additional less preferred embodiments of the game can also include different numbers of cards dealt to each player. Although the most preferred embodiments are discussed above, other less preferred versions can include for example six or seven cards dealt to each player. In the latter case, the half-hands can be divided in any manner; preferably, however, each half-hand has at least two cards; and, more preferably, each half-hand has two cards and the remaining cards are thrown back.